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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this descriptive summary was to report on a Swedish preschool curriculum evaluation project. The study had as its purpose to evaluate the existing preschool program by comparing 130 preschool children with 130 home-based children on a number of variables relating to preschool objectives. This evaluation was carried out when the children were in first grade, with a follow-up study done two years later. The home group (the control group) was chosen from among the children on the waiting list for preschool. Matching was performed on the basis of sex, age, father's occupation, living area, and number of siblings. Although results did not clearly indicate whether preschool was a favorable experience for all children, certain specific positive gains were evident. An experimental preschool program was designed based on the findings and implications of this evaluation study. (CS)

SWEDEN - RESEARCH CONCERNING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONTENT AND METHODS OF THE PRE-SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Karl-Gustav STUKÅT

Some years ago our institute performed a study which had as its purpose to evaluate the existing pre-school programme by comparing 130 pre-school children with 130 home-based children on a number variables related to the pre-school objectives. This evaluation was carried out when the children were in grade 1. A follow-up study with a more limited number of variables was undertaken two years later in grade 3.

Comparisons of this kind are often invalidated by the difficulty experienced in finding equivalent groups. We were in the lucky situation for research purposes, but not for others, in that the number of children on the pre-school waiting list was greater than the number of children who received pre-school training. We could therefore choose the home group (the control group) from among the children on the waiting list. Furthermore, matching was performed on the basis of sex, age, father's occupation, living area and number of siblings. The experimental group included children who had attended pre-school for 1, 2 or sometimes 3 or 4 years. The main results are given in Table 1. A plus sign means significant difference in favour of the pre-school group, when in parenthesis the sign reflects a marked tendency. A zero sign stands for no difference.

Table 1

	<u>Grade 1</u>	<u>Grade 3</u>
<u>Physical</u>		
Weight	0	
Height	0	
Diseases during pre-school	(+)	
Diseases after pre-school	(-)	
<u>Motor</u>		
Lincoln-Oseretsky	0	
Rhythm test	0	
<u>Social emotional</u>		
Daily life tasks	+	
Adjustment in home	0	
Adjustment in school	0	0
Extraversion	(+)	
Sociometric status	0	
Observations: activity	0	
" group play	0	
" organised play	0	
Frustration: extropunitivity	(+)	
" intropunitivity	0	
" impunitivity	0	
Suggestibility	0	
Nervous symptoms	0	0
<u>Interests and activities</u>		
General motor activity	(+)	
Manual-constructive play	0	
Role playing	0	
Intellectual games	0	

	<u>Grade 1</u>	<u>Grade 3</u>
<u>Knowledge and achievement</u>		
General knowledge	+	0
Vocabulary	(+)	
Language use: coherence	+	
" stereotypes	0	
" creativity	(+)	
" correctness	+	
Moral concepts (Piaget)	0	
Painting: form level	0	
" colour	(+)	
" originality	(+)	
<u>School readiness and school achievement</u>		
School readiness test	0	
Reading	0	0
Spelling	0	0
Arithmetic	0	0
Teacher rating of school achievement	(+)	0

From these results the question of whether pre-school is favourable for the children or not cannot be answered by a simple "yes" or "no". In some variables the pre-school children apparently had gained from their pre-school experience, in others there were no differences. Is there any coherent pattern in the result picture? With knowledge of the types of activity that characterised, and still characterise ordinary pre-school in Sweden, it seems as if positive effects appear in those areas to which special attention is given: general knowledge, vocabulary, verbal expression, daily life routines, painting, manual-constructive tasks, whereas areas with more intangible objectives such as social-emotional adjustment and mental health do not show corresponding effects. Nor does there seem to be general transfer to achievement in elementary school subjects. Somewhat paradoxically, the results seem to suggest that pre-school, which is programmatically a non-teaching school, achieves its most evident effects in areas where some kind of teaching still takes place. There seems to be some relationship between these findings and "the specificity of effects" noted in recent Head Start evaluations.

Other comments could be made on the basis of the results. Suffice it to say that no negative effects were recorded. Thus pre-school seems to fulfil Professor Nummea's modest criterion that pre-school should at least not do any harm. As to the influence exerted by the length of pre-school experience, a positive correlation was found only in the variable "daily life routines".

The results of the above described evaluation study provided the main impetus for a new project aiming at the development of an experimental pre-school programme using the experience gained.

The main features of the experimental programme are:

1. The programme is not intended to be a substitute for, but a supplement to, the existent activities in pre-school. It has been planned to cover about one-third of the pre-school day.
2. Three areas were somewhat subjectively chosen for innovation: social training, communication skills and concept formation. By a happy coincidence these areas are the same as those chosen by the Swedish Pre-school Commission.
3. The programme is planned mainly for 6-year-olds, although it can probably be used in non-graded settings with children of varying ages.

4. More attention is given to making the pre-school goals more concrete than is usual. Official goal statements are so general and vague that they give very little guidance for the teacher's daily work. Not very much more is said than that pre-school should aim at fostering the child's physical, motor, intellectual and social-emotional development. Perhaps official goal statements cannot or should not be more specific, but the teacher cannot stay at this general abstract level. In this pre-school project an attempt has been made to give the teacher examples of how concrete activities can be derived from the general objectives.

Thus, under the heading of "social skills" are grouped such objectives as understanding and respecting the individual's value, understanding and respecting rules and norms for human relations, understanding and respecting emotional reactions. Each of these objectives are then spelled out further. For example, understanding the individual's value means understanding oneself and others, and this means, among other things, being able to describe oneself, knowing what one is able to achieve and not to achieve, being aware of situations when one has made somebody happy or when someone else has done something good to you, knowing similarities and differences between handicapped and non-handicapped children, being able to find games when one plays with handicapped fellows, etc.

Communication skills include ability to give information, receive information and interpret information, and also preparatory reading functions. Each of these aspects have been specified further.

Concept formation is mainly centred around such objectives as identifying and describing objects, classifying them and perceiving relationships. Ample illustrations are given for each of the objectives. Concept training is not limited to quantitative or science concepts; applications to the social world are also used.

The project group has actively pursued its efforts to furnish concrete instances within the different main objectives. I would like to emphasise, however, that the ambition has not been to achieve a complete coverage of the innumerable subjects. This is impossible and furthermore, it would have disadvantageous effects on the teachers who probably would feel restrained in their own initiatives to interpret pre-school goals. The ambition has been the more modest one of suggesting a way of thinking, a way of relating lofty goals to the manifold and dynamic daily school life.

It should also be stressed that the objectives are not to be considered as terminal goals to be reached by all pupils during the pre-school period. Rather the goal descriptions are pictures of sequential steps in development.

5. In methodology the programme has drawn upon the ideas of Nornburger, Erikson, Piaget and Skinner. The teachers are given rather detailed methodological suggestions related to the different objectives, and a variety of material has been developed or available material has been used for the programme purposes. In addition to activities aiming at goals in one area an attempt has been made on the basis of experience, to integrate activities which aim at different objectives, e.g., concept training using family or society situations and using the opportunity for language training situations.

During the field testing year the teachers had an initial three-day instruction period. They were given new instructions and materials every second week and were also visited by consultants every fortnight.

6. The evaluation of the programme has been performed by comparing 500 children who followed the experimental programme and 500 control children.

The results are being analysed. Table 2 below gives some preliminary findings.

Table 2

Social observations

Co-operation	+
Gives support	0
Responsibility	0
Gives help	+
Dominance	-
Aggression	-
Independence	0
Asks for help	0
Adjustment	+

Communication

Phonet. encl.	0
Vocabulary	+

School readiness

Reading test	+
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Concepts

Qualitative	+
Science	+
Social	+

Attitudes to:

Pre-school	+
School	0

Teacher

Nurturant role	+
Non-directive	+
Orderliness	-
Dominance	-

Indirectness (Flanders obs)	+
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